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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 9475
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3424
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 1142
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 2963
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 3380

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 004742

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, S/CT, PM, INR/EAP, AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO AND J5
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)
AID/W FOR ANE/EAA PHILIPPINE DESK OFFICER CALISTA DOWNEY; DAA/ANE
JAMES KUNDER; ANE/ESA DEBORAH KENNEDY-IRAHETA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [EAID](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: SIX AMBASSADORS PITCH IN FOR MINDANAO PEACE AND
DEVELOPMENT

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

11. (U) In a unique effort to demonstrate international support for peace and development, Ambassador Kristie Kenney led a group of five Ambassadors from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom in a visit to the conflict-affected Mindanao provinces of Zamboanga and Basilan. The GRP Undersecretary to the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process accompanied the group. The Ambassadors expressed their collective interest to bring peace and development in Mindanao and support the GRP-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace talks. The Ambassadors discussed their ongoing coordination and synergy among their various programs on education and job skills enhancement, small business development, improved healthcare, agricultural sustainability, poverty alleviation and counter-terrorism. The Ambassadors also discussed security issues with Western Mindanao Command (WESTMINCOM) Commander Lt. General Eugenio Cedo and U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) Commander. They met with Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat to talk about partnership programs, and, on the island of Basilan, discussed economic prospects with Basilan business leaders. The Ambassadors also participated in ribbon-cutting ceremonies for U.S., Australian and Canadian government development projects in Zamboanga and Basilan. End Summary.

PROMOTING GREATER COORDINATION AND SYNERGY

12. (U) On November 13, 2006, Ambassador Kenney together with Ambassador Tony Hely of Australia, Ambassador Peter Sutherland of Canada, Ambassador Ryuichiro Yamazaki of Japan, Ambassador David Pine of New Zealand, and Ambassador Peter Beckingham of the United Kingdom, visited Zamboanga and Basilan, two conflict-affected areas in Mindanao. The rationale for this U.S.-led visit was to

demonstrate the group's mutual interests in supporting peace and development in Mindanao and the GRP-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace talks. This trip also provided other opportunities. For those ambassadors less well traveled in Mindanao, this trip deepened their understanding of parts of Mindanao that they had not visited due to security concerns; it was an opportunity for them to see first hand a sampling of the development programs being implemented in Mindanao; they heard in Basilan how economic and social prospects there are now brighter as a result of the transforming effect of development assistance and military action; it was an opportunity to leverage resources from other U.S. partners in contributing to peace and development; and, finally, it was an opportunity to coordinate, avoid duplication and create synergy through our respective development and military assistance efforts. By working together as partners, the six countries are effectively and efficiently working towards establishing zones of peace and prosperity in Mindanao that will spur development throughout the Philippines.

13. (U) The USG has adopted an integrated "3-D" (Diplomacy, Defense, and Development) approach to supporting peace and development in Mindanao. The three-pronged strategy utilizes diplomatic channels to partner with and engage GRP agencies to mutually support peace initiatives, enhances defense and security by supporting the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to eliminate terrorist recruiting grounds and sanctuaries, and carries out a broad spectrum of development assistance to improve the quality of life in conflict-affected communities in Mindanao. The approach was successfully employed in Basilan, an island province in the Sulu archipelago and a former Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) stronghold. USAID development assistance provided since 1997, coupled with civil-military and humanitarian activities with U.S.-supported AFP operations started in 2002, enhanced security and paved the way to transforming Basilan into a zone of peace that it is today.

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MILITARY BRIEFING

14. (U) WESTMINCOM Commander Lt. General Eugenio Cedo and JSOTF Commander briefed the five ambassadors on "Operation Ultimatum," the on-going military operations on the island of Jolo targeting the senior Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah leadership. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) military operations are more and more successful in establishing zones of peace on the island. And civil affairs development projects in conflict-affected villages, including the provision of medical treatment, the building of schools, community centers, and coordination with USAID and NGO assistance, are contributing to overall security by winning the hearts and minds of the residents in these communities, separating them from terrorist groups.

MEETING WITH ZAMBOANGA CITY MAYOR LOBREGAT

15. (U) The Ambassadors jointly called on Zamboanga City Mayor Celso Lobregat who recognized each of the Ambassadors for their respective development assistance contributions to Zamboanga City. A press conference followed, and each Ambassador took the opportunity to share his or her perspective on the purpose of their visit to Mindanao, i.e., the mutual interest in showing support for Mindanao's development and the peace process between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the GRP.

IMPROVING ECONOMIC PROSPECTS IN BASILAN

16. (U) In Isabela City on the island of Basilan, the Ambassadors met with members of Basilan's three Chambers of Commerce and other business leaders at the Filipino fast-food restaurant Jollibee, itself a positive indicator of economic growth on the island.

Discussion centered on current bright business prospects in Basilan, what a positive and dramatic change it is from the past, and that they were now experiencing the tangible benefits that follow when communities reject violence and choose peace and development.

¶7. (U) A vibrant woman leader, a trustee of the Autonomous Basilan Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, made the point that this unique visit by six Ambassadors to Basilan was yet another sign, "a miracle", that shows the bright future of this island province. The Executive Director of another chamber stated, "We are experiencing a renaissance, especially in the business sector." They cited Basilan's fertile soil and location in a typhoon-free zone as the most attractive features for potential agricultural investments. Major products are copra, rubber, coffee, and cassava. Businessmen indicated that U.S. business interests present in the sixties disappeared during the conflict years, but that several U.S. firms, like Cargill and Coca Cola, were now present on the island. Cell coverage is adequate and the mood of businessmen good. They are hoping to tap into the tourism market, building hotels, and looking in particular at developing nearby Malimaui Island as a beach resort, initially for domestic tourism. They see the wisdom of protecting coral reefs and have already established one marine sanctuary. They cited the need for assistance in protecting their coastal and fishery resources and cited dynamite fishing as a particular problem they are working to solve. Among the constraints to business development, they cited the high cost of power, poor land line phone connections, and the need for more farm-to-market roads.

¶8. (U) Some of these leaders appealed for more development assistance, e.g., the mayor requested a fire truck. However, some of the younger leaders made the refreshing point that they have work to do on their own to take advantage of the opportunities which their secure environment now offers them.

PROJECTS HELP IMPROVE LIVES OF RESIDENTS

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¶9. (U) The Ambassadors participated in three events highlighting U.S., Australian, and Canadian Government support to improve the lives of Zamboanga and Basilan residents. Ambassador Kenney turned over to the Parent-Teacher-Community Association (PTCA) of the Islamic Institute of the Philippines, a madrasah school in Zamboanga City, a USAID-funded Computer Literacy and Internet Connection (CLIC) Program and an EASE Matching Grant package consisting of 14 computers, internet connection, a local area network, printers, software, and a range of computer reference materials. The USAID's CLIC Program helps bridge the digital divide by partnering with PTCAs of high schools which do not have access to the internet. USAID has assisted 425 schools in conflict affected areas of Mindanao, benefiting nearly 400,000 students and more than 11,000 teachers.

¶10. (U) Australian Ambassador Hely inaugurated the Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID)-assisted Community Learning Center in Sabong, Basilan. The Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM) Project supports school age children and adults in remote and disadvantaged groups gain access to quality formal or non-formal school programs. The Sabong Community Learning Center received support for the conduct of early childhood classes for pre-school children, functional literacy and livelihood enterprise skills training for parents, and non-formal education accreditation and equivalency for out-of-school youth. AUSAID has assisted 60 communities in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

¶11. (U) Canadian Ambassador Sutherland handed to Basilan Governor Wahab Akbar computer equipment to support the computerization of the local government unit's financial management information system. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)-funded Local Governance Support Program in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao works with the region's 101 municipalities in supporting the development of well-functioning local governments as catalysts for poverty reduction and peace.

¶12. (U) Even on this relatively peaceful island there is more work to be done. Basilan Provincial Governor stated, "The Abu Sayyaf is not our problem. Our number one enemy is poverty; our number two enemy is illiteracy. Once we solve these, we will have peace and prosperity in Basilan." The lack of opportunity for youth, especially out-of-school youth, was also cited as a major problem. This was apparent at one of our stops. As we participated in celebrating the turnover of assistance in this particular community, a group of young men stood to the side and appeared disinterested in the event.

COMMENTS

¶13. (SBU) The Ambassadors' trip to Zamboanga and Basilan, which received considerable press here, in addition to demonstrating the U.S., Australian, Canadian, Japanese, New Zealand, and U.K. Governments' collective commitment to supporting peace and development in Mindanao, represented a conscious effort to better harness individual donor assistance programs, in concert with the Philippines Development Forum's Mindanao Working Group, into a comprehensive strategy to address development, peace and security in the southern Philippines. The participation of the GRP's Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process and other local government officials, as well as the trip logistics support provided by the Armed Forces of the Philippines reflected our close partnership with the GRP. Finally, this landmark travel to conflict-affected areas of Mindanao by six Ambassadors was the result of an impressive U.S. Country Team effort. Several of the Ambassadors noted that the U.S. Embassy-provided briefing materials greatly expanded their knowledge of international development and defense programs in Mindanao.

KENNEY